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Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General*

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution 54/147 of 17 December 1999 in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to it at its fifty-fifth session, taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum.

II. Action taken to implement General Assembly resolution 54/147

A. Overview

2. Despite significant socio-economic progress and relative stability achieved by a number of countries in 1999, Africa continues to count among its populations many hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. Violence in their respective countries, poverty, drought and famine have led individuals and families to cross international borders or move to more fertile places within their countries.

3. Since the last report on this issue (A/54/414), the main refugee groups continue to originate in Sierra Leone (487,200), Sudan (467,700), Somalia (451,500), Angola (350,700), Eritrea (345,600) and Burundi (325,500). Although some limited return movements have taken place, as of mid-2000, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was assisting nearly 6.3 million persons in Africa (nearly one third of the total number of refugees worldwide).

4. In the Horn of Africa, a Tripartite Agreement signed on 7 April 2000 by Eritrea, Sudan and UNHCR raised hopes that some 160,000 Eritrean refugees, who have been living in Sudan for the past 30 years, would finally go home. One month later, the resumption of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea sent some 90,000 Eritrean refugees fleeing to Sudan and displaced an estimated 750,000 persons within Eritrea itself. It is hoped that the Cessation of Hostilities agreement signed recently by the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea will pave the way for the return of peace and stability in the region and allow the voluntary repatriation of all refugees and displaced persons.

5. At the beginning of the year, the situation in Sierra Leone was considered to be gradually returning to normal, with the deployment of the United Nations peacekeepers inside the country. UNHCR was making plans to mount a large-scale voluntary return programme, provided the situation remained stable. In addition to its main office in Freetown, UNHCR had opened a field base in Kenema, in the south-western part of the country. Unfortunately, the resumption of fighting in May 2000 led to new departures: by mid-year, some 4,000 Sierra Leonian refugees had crossed into Guinea, where they are receiving assistance from UNHCR.

6. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be of major concern for humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR. The latter continues to execute its protection mandate but faces considerable difficulties of access to some locations. The conflict shows no sign of ending, despite the efforts currently deployed both by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and by the United Nations. The recent fighting in Kisangani has resulted in the death of hundreds of civilians and caused massive harm to an already fragile economy. Insecurity and the lack of serious commitment to the peace process by the various warring parties is hampering the full deployment of the United Nations peacekeepers and military observers. During her recent visit to the region and in meetings with government officials, the High Commissioner for Refugees again underscored the importance of a sustained peace, which would allow refugees and displaced persons to go back home in safety and dignity.

7. In southern Africa, the unresolved conflict in Angola continues to cause grave concern. Renewed fighting between Angolan government troops and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels has pushed out thousands of people, mainly to Zambia and Namibia. Thousands of others have been displaced and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. So far, insecurity, the presence of land mines and poor infrastructure have frustrated efforts by aid agencies, including UNHCR, to provide assistance. Following a joint assessment mission in April and May of this year, UNHCR and other agencies, supported by a network of international and local non-governmental organizations, decided to embark on a programme aimed at bringing relief and

protection to thousands of displaced persons in Uige, Zaire and Luanda Bengo provinces.

B. Regional overviews

8. The regional overviews below focus on the main developments in sub-Saharan Africa since the most recent report to the General Assembly (A/54/414). They have been compiled by UNHCR with contributions from other agencies that complement its work, notably the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the United Nations Secretariat. They also include a contribution from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

1. West and central Africa

9. Some 2.5 million refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR are to be found in this region. Prospects for durable solutions which appeared during the second half of 1998 now seem more elusive.

10. Although the Presidents of Guinea and Liberia met in February 2000 in Bamako, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in an attempt to resolve their dispute amicably, tension persists between the two countries. Moreover, security incidents in Lofa county in the north of Liberia triggered the flight of more than 11,000 Sierra Leonean refugees to safer areas further south, and some 8,000 Liberians were reported to have left their homes for Guinea. UNHCR and its non-governmental organization partners also had to leave the area. Reconnaissance missions are sent from time to time to monitor the fate of the remaining group of Sierra Leonean refugees who decided to remain in situ.

11. In Central Africa, Sudanese refugees were once again on the move towards Chad. The civil wars in the Congo and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo led more refugees from both countries to flee to Gabon and the Central African Republic; in the latter, many of them were soldiers who were disarmed at the border.

12. Despite situations such as these, where uncertainty prevails, there have been some positive steps towards political stability, such as the general elections held recently in Benin, underscoring the country's commitment to democratic principles and institutions. The return to power of a civilian government through democratic elections in Nigeria is also an encouraging development.

Repatriation to Liberia

13. Liberia is a nation emerging from almost a decade of intense and widespread civil conflict. The protracted and recurrent insecurity has led to flagging interest by donors in assisting Liberia. However, such assistance is becoming more and more crucial if the gap between relief operations and economic development is to be bridged. In this context, the phase-out and handover of UNHCR's reintegration activities scheduled for the end of 2000 now appears a difficult task to complete on time.

14. Since the repatriation operation started in May 1997, UNHCR has assisted the return of over 141,000 Liberian refugees. Meanwhile, it is estimated that over close to 215,000 Liberian refugees have returned home spontaneously, bringing the total number of returnees to over 356,000 as of June 2000. Serious security incidents in Lofa county in August 1999 and rebel incursions into refugee camps obliged Guinea to close its borders and humanitarian agencies to suspend their activities. In light of recent changes, however, including the opening in April 2000 of the border between Guinea and Liberia and the alleviation of some complex operational and logistics constraints, UNHCR is now planning to complete the organized repatriation of Liberian refugees by the end of December 2000.

15. In an attempt to address some of these issues in the context of the Brookings Initiative, UNHCR, in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, proposes to implement a community-based project that will strengthen security watch and enhance the civil administration in Lofa county.

Repatriation to Sierra Leone

16. The Sierra Leonean refugees, growing in number, who show an interest in returning home have been frustrated by the turbulent situation prevailing in the country. Despite this insecurity, UNHCR has continued its preparation on the ground to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees to safe places inside Sierra Leone. This crucial planning phase covers tasks such as the gathering of data on the refugees' areas of origin, the

preparation of detailed profiles of returnee areas, the monitoring of spontaneous return patterns and the establishment by UNHCR of a presence in the field wherever access is possible.

17. Following a high-level visit conducted in early February 2000 by the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, UNDP Associate Administrator and the World Bank Vice President for External Affairs, the efforts to bridge the gap between relief support services and development activities were spurred by the Brookings Initiative initiated in Sierra Leone. As part of the process, a Brookings secretariat was put in place, and UNHCR launched a coordinated approach for expanding the inter-agency support needed to foster the initiative beyond the three pioneer agencies.

18. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs dispatched a number of humanitarian assistance missions to areas that had remained inaccessible, due to the conflict. With the resumption of hostilities in May 2000, the Office has been supporting efforts to coordinate the assistance provided to the newly displaced.

Guinea

19. In Guinea, some 463,000 refugees have been receiving food assistance under the current memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP), although reduced supplies were anticipated following the census conducted last February in the area of Forecariah (south-east). Since hostilities resumed in Sierra Leone, over 4,000 new refugees fleeing insecurity have arrived in Forecariah. UNHCR has prepared a contingency plan in the event of further new arrivals in Guinea and in Liberia, should the security situation deteriorate further in Sierra Leone.

20. Continued funding support from the donor community will be of paramount importance in providing adequate protection and assistance to refugees in Guinea, to alleviate some of the environmental consequences linked to the presence of a large refugee population, and to address the issue of burden-sharing with the Government and people of Guinea.

Repatriation to Chad

21. UNHCR has continued to facilitate the return of Chadian refugees from neighbouring countries. For the current year, UNHCR plans to encourage the return of about 10,000 Chadian refugees from Cameroon, 4,400 from Sudan, 1,300 from Central African Republic, 500 from Nigeria and 200 from Benin. By early May, UNHCR had facilitated the return of some 1,200 Chadian refugees from Cameroon and planned additional fact-finding tours for refugee leaders in their country of origin. For those choosing not to repatriate, UNHCR will pursue opportunities for possible integration in the countries of asylum.

Gabon

22. Some 12,500 refugees from the Republic of the Congo reside in Gabon and receive assistance from UNHCR and sister agencies. To help meet their needs, UNHCR expanded its presence in Gabon with the opening of a branch office in Libreville and two field offices in the country.

2. Great Lakes region

23. The situation in the Great Lakes region continues to be unpredictable. The optimism surrounding the Lusaka Peace Accords on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Arusha peace process on Burundi has given way to caution and some scepticism. The fighting between external forces over the town of Kisangani further complicated an already bleak humanitarian situation in the country.

24. The breakdown of mediation efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has further reduced the likelihood of a constructive dialogue between the Government and the warring factions. Population movements created by these recent crises include that of some 180,000 Congolese who have fled the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Republic of Tanzania, Rwanda, Angola, and the Congo. Movements have also occurred from the Congo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (60,000) and to Gabon (12,500). As a more positive development, the mid-1999 peace accord in the Congo has allowed the return of some 50,000 Congolese refugees.

25. In Burundi, despite commendable efforts to achieve a settlement, concrete results remain to be seen. Meanwhile, continuing hostilities and tension in the region have not only weakened the institution of asylum but also brought untold suffering to the civilian population, as illustrated by the situation in the town of

Kisangani, where an estimated 500 civilians lost their lives.

United Republic of Tanzania

26. Burundian refugees continue to flee to the United Republic of Tanzania, which currently hosts one of the biggest refugee caseloads in Africa (488,000 refugees). While the Government continues to maintain an open-door asylum policy, the authorities are concerned about insecurity in and around refugee camps, where several security incidents have occurred in the past few months. UNHCR consequently expanded its security package through the deployment of two additional field security officers. Support was also extended to the Government to deal with security issues in refugee-affected areas and surrounding villages, with the result that the civilian character of the camps was by and large preserved. UNHCR also continued to address the problem of sexual and gender-based violence through preventive measures, such as awareness-raising at the community level and the provision of legal, medical and psycho-social support to victims.

27. UNHCR continues to provide care and maintenance to the majority of the refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, in the absence of prospects of sustainable solutions in the countries of origin (Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

28. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo which accommodates some 300,000 refugees and 1.4 million displaced persons, efforts to meet basic assistance and protection needs are being undertaken despite an extremely difficult working environment, since the country has been engulfed in war since the beginning of the armed rebellion in August 1998. To date, the total refugee population assisted by UNHCR in the country stands at some 180,000 persons. It includes refugees from Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Uganda, and the Congo.

29. Although conditions inside the country are not yet conducive to any massive repatriation movement, groups of the Congolese who sought asylum in the Sudan and Chad have opted to return home and have benefited from UNHCR's assistance. Repatriation movements from the Democratic Republic of the Congo mainly include those of Rwandans still residing in the Kivus, of whom some 37,000 persons have benefited from UNHCR's assistance since January 1999. Since the return home of Angolan and Sudanese refugees does not seem possible for the time being, local integration schemes have been designed for them and are being implemented.

30. UNHCR's office in Kinshasa has set up a project within its programme for 2000 to assist some 300,000 displaced persons. An agreement has been signed with Human Dignity in the World, a local non-governmental organization, to provide medical care and shelter in the Kinshasa area. A second phase of the project aims at catering for the displaced in Orientale (Bunia), and Katanga (Lubumbashi) provinces. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are involved in assisting them. WFP has also set up offices in accessible zones, where it provides food assistance.

Rwanda

31. The situation in Rwanda continues to be closely monitored, particularly in the north-west of the country where there were signs of possible population movements due to increasing tension. Returnee movements continued from North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo into Rwanda at an average rate of 300-400 per week. On arrival, returnees are assisted by UNHCR with the usual family package composed of food and non-food items.

32. A census conducted in the camps accommodating Congolese refugees in Rwanda reduced their estimated number from 34,000 to 28,000 persons. Incidents of violence against women were reported in these camps, as well as of restricted movements. Both issues had been taken up with the authorities, and resolved.

33. Several cross-border meetings have been held with relevant government officials in both Rwanda and Burundi to discuss individual cases of refugees. UNHCR continued to play a major role in the reintegration of returnees by closely monitoring their return. In early 2000, UNHCR contributed to the drafting, translation and distribution of the refugee legislation. Preparations are now being made to assist the National Eligibility Commission, once in place.

34. Although Rwanda is not included in the United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), UNICEF continues to support many emergency related interventions, particularly to address the needs

of some 650,000 internally displaced persons in the north-western part of the country. UNICEF's assistance included the reunification of separated children, support to some 60,000 child (female)-headed-households, support to children in prison, including their basic care while in custody, and prompt disposal of cases.

Burundi

35. In Burundi, efforts by the facilitator of the Arusha Peace process, former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, have achieved some progress, but peace still remains elusive. The strict security imposed after the fatal shooting in 1999 of 11 people, including two United Nations staff members, was downgraded to phase three, allowing for the return of skeleton staff and the resumption of limited humanitarian work. United Nations agencies in Burundi, in conjunction with the Bretton Woods institutions, are currently developing a comprehensive post-conflict approach which will include measures aimed at the sustainable repatriation and reintegration of refugees following the signing of a peace accord, anticipated before the end of the year 2000. In close cooperation between UNHCR, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNDP, specific mechanisms are being developed for collaborative activities with respect to reintegration and rehabilitation.

36. At the request of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons undertook a follow-up mission to Burundi in February 2000. Its main purpose was to raise with the Government and other actors the issue of forced relocation (known as *regroupement*) and to convey the objections of the international community to this practice as a violation of international law and contrary to the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons. OHCHR's representative helped facilitate the country team's dialogue with the Government on this issue, calling for the dismantling of the more than 50 *regroupement* camps established since last year.

3. East Africa and Horn of Africa

37. While the year was dominated by the resumption of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia, there was also a number of breakthroughs in a region traditionally known for its long-standing refugee problems. Meetings took place to discuss the situation of Somali refugees as well as that of pre-1991 Ethiopian and pre-1993 Eritrean refugees. As a result, strategies and solutions were developed, aimed at ending, where possible, protracted refugee programmes.

Ethiopian refugees

38. After lengthy consultations, agreements have been reached on arrangements for the application of the cessation clause to pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees, beginning in March of this year. Some 3,700 Ethiopian refugees registered for repatriation from the Sudan and will be assisted to repatriate. Both WFP and UNHCR have advised the Government of the Sudan that as from 1 September 2000, only screened-in pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees would benefit from international assistance. In Kenya, when the established deadline was set for 1 May 2000, UNHCR did not expect a large number of pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees to request voluntary repatriation.

39. Previous assessments conducted jointly by UNHCR and the Government of Ethiopia had indicated that some 50,000 refugees currently in the camps at Jijiga were in fact Ethiopian returnees from north-west Somalia who had not been properly integrated into their local communities. The challenge facing UNHCR, WFP and the Government of Ethiopia is to convince this group to settle into their local communities. Reintegration activities at the communal level have been planned in the various areas of return in Ethiopia.

40. Also in application of arrangements for implementation of the cessation clause, in the case of pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees, the Government of Kenya has agreed to assess applications to stay from some 3,500 Ethiopians recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Pending the results of this exercise, the Government continues to recognize their status as refugees. In Djibouti, all preparations have been made to repatriate 1,587 Ethiopian refugees who arrived in the country during the Ogaden war. Other individuals wishing to remain in Djibouti will seek regularization of their status with the authorities once the application of the cessation clause is put into effect.

Repatriation to Somalia

41. An encouraging development has been the resumption, albeit at a reduced pace, of the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Ethiopia to north-west Somalia and the undertaking by the Ethiopian Government to make arrangements for the closure of the Darwanaji, Teferiber and Hartisheikh camps. By mid 2000, some 10,000 Somali refugees from the Aware camps in Ethiopia were assisted to repatriate to north-west Somalia. Another 85,000 refugees had registered for repatriation from the Jijiga camp, while some 3,000 have registered for settlement among the local population.

42. UNHCR's office in Kenya assisted 857 Somali refugees from the Dadaab and Kakuma camps with voluntary repatriation to north-west and north-east Somalia in February 2000. It is estimated that another 2,000 Somali refugees may opt for voluntary repatriation in 2000.

Repatriation to Eritrea

43. The resumption of fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea in early May 2000 resulted in an influx of some 90,000 Eritrean refugees into the Sudan. Some 750,000 people have also been displaced inside Eritrea. Plans to repatriate some 160,000 Eritrean refugees who have been living in the Sudan for the past 30 years were put on hold. It is hoped that the recent cessation of hostilities agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea will lead to the return of lasting peace and, in the long run, the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation and has strengthened its presence in Asmara and at field locations in the Sudan, with a view to working closely with government officials on both sides of the border, should the refugees decide to go home.

Repatriation to Kenya

44. In June 2000, UNHCR and the Governments of Kenya and Ethiopia met in Nairobi and signed a tripartite agreement that should pave the way for the return of over 5,000 Kenyan refugees who have been in Moyale, southern Ethiopia since 1992. According to the agreements reached, the return of the refugees to the northern Kenyan districts of Wajir, Mandera and Isiolo are scheduled to take place in August and September 2000. In October of last year, a first repatriation convoy was stopped at the border close to the town of Moyale, the Government of Kenya having raised concerns for the security of the refugees in the areas of return. Since then the refugees have been awaiting the authorization of the Government of Kenya, allowing them to return home.

45. In February of this year, a screening exercise was undertaken in camps accommodating Kenyan refugees in Ethiopia. Some 5,400 refugees have now been cleared to return home, having lived in exile since late 1992.

4. Southern Africa

46. UNHCR assists over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in countries of southern Africa and 300,000 internally displaced persons in the northern provinces of Angola. The assistance provided includes local integration, care and maintenance, resettlement and repatriation. Unfortunately, the circumstances in the countries of origin have not favoured the initiation of repatriation programmes in the region. However, the necessary mechanisms are in place, should repatriation be feasible in the near future.

47. In Angola, basic assistance (food, shelter and medicine) is provided to over 13,000 refugees, the majority from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At present, UNHCR has re-established its presence in northern Angola, providing food, shelter, medical assistance and protection to some 300,000 internally displaced persons living in the provinces of Luanda, Uige and Zaire.

48. Developments in the Caprivi Strip of Namibia triggered an influx of asylum-seekers into Botswana, which now hosts over 3,000 refugees, almost all of them residing in the Dukwi camp. They are provided with food and shelter. The Botswana Refugee Advisory Committee, in collaboration with UNHCR, is working to integrate some of the refugees locally. A few have had to be resettled, on security grounds, in Denmark, the United States of America and Canada.

49. Elsewhere in the region, UNHCR continues to provide assistance and protection to over 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from various countries at Dowi camp in Malawi, while in Mozambique, extensive flood damage at the Bobole and Massaka transit centres has affected close to 1,750 refugees. UNHCR's priority task has been to restore food distribution, transport assistance, medical care and primary education for refugee children. UNICEF has

provided curative and preventive health care to the affected population — in particular, to internally displaced people — preventing and controlling outbreaks of malaria, cholera and other communicable diseases, providing safe water and sanitation to the affected population and providing logistical support for the delivery of emergency services

50. Namibia has been affected both by the conflict in Angola and by internal instability linked to the separatist movement in the Caprivi region. Refugees from Angola have increased to 20,580 persons, most of whom are provided with food, non-food items, medical assistance, legal assistance and shelter at the Osire camp, Kassava and Onambutu transit centres. In the past few months, UNHCR also organized protection workshops for government officials.

51. South Africa continues to host the largest number of urban refugees and asylum-seekers in the region, totalling some 58,000 people. To this caseload, UNHCR provides basic assistance and legal protection. Prominent among the Office's activities is the relentless campaign to roll back xenophobia against refugees and asylum-seekers in the region. A recent donation from Ted Turner has enabled the office to engage in reproductive health activities for young refugees.

52. In Swaziland, UNHCR's vigorous efforts to promote refugee law and protection principles led to translation into the local language of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention governing specific aspects of the refugee problem in Africa and to the country's accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Some 650 refugees and asylum-seekers in the Malindze camp receive basic household items and basic health and sanitary services.

53. Zambia, which plays host to the region's largest refugee population, witnessed the arrival of thousands of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. Recent pipeline problems experienced by WFP further compounded the burden of providing basic assistance to over 218,000 refugees scattered in the country and living in camps, transit centres or spontaneously settled. As an interim measure, UNHCR is providing corn, oil and beans to 60,000 refugees. It is also in the process of establishing a new camp in Kala to accommodate the ever-increasing refugee population.

54. UNHCR is carefully monitoring the situation in Zimbabwe, where there have been indications of instability. In the meantime, the damage caused by floods in the Tongogara camp is being repaired, and basic assistance is being resumed for the benefit of the 2,000 refugees in the country.

C. Inter-agency cooperation

55. In addition to the examples given above, inter-agency cooperation has been an important feature of assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, although the ravages caused by the AIDS pandemic have now added to the difficulties encountered. A few specific areas deserve particular mention.

1. Relief assistance

56. As in past years, both UNICEF and WFP have provided essential supplies in many situations. In the Sudan, UNICEF has provided large quantities of emergency drugs, relief and shelter supplies and household items and has conducted polio vaccination campaigns and meningitis control measures. Health measures designed to contain polio and outbreaks of measles were also organized in Angola, where emergency supplies of therapeutic milk and specialized non-food items were made available to combat malnutrition. Other essential programmes included schooling for primary-school-age children and mine-awareness activities.

57. In the Congo and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, essential assistance was provided in the educational and health sectors, through national immunization days. Domestic needs in the form of plastic sheeting, blankets, mattresses, lamps and toilet soap were also supplied. Assistance of a similar kind was provided in Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia. Needs in the latter four countries were accentuated by the drought affecting many parts of eastern Africa. In all of these countries, maternal and child health measures figured prominently in UNICEF's activities.

58. In 2000 WFP is assisting some 2.1 million refugees and more than twice that number of internally displaced persons in sub-Saharan Africa. The total food needs were estimated at some 906,000 tons. WFP's largest emergency operations in 1999 were in the

Sudan and Angola. In the latter country, monthly deliveries have increased to 16,000 tons. Other major programmes have concerned refugees and internally displaced persons in the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and countries in West Africa. WFP's emergency response has given special attention to the specific needs of women, children, the elderly and the disabled.

59. Thanks to an Emergency Humanitarian Initiative set up by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, charter flights bearing necessary relief items were flown to Kisangani. The items were for the benefit of the displaced and other vulnerable populations.

2. Access to populations of concern

60. In the past year the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat has continued to play an important role in advocating for safe and unhindered access to affected populations. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the Office has been engaged in a series of workshops with local communities and stakeholders in developing methods for the identification of vulnerable populations, in order to enhance the delivery of assistance in the area. In the Sudan, tripartite Security and Beneficiary Protocols were signed involving the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs for the Sudan, aimed at securing the safety of civilians and humanitarian personnel and unimpeded access to beneficiaries. In particular, provisions were made to open up rail, road and river cross-line corridors in the southern sector.

3. Coordination of resources

61. In support of resource mobilization for humanitarian activities of United Nations agencies, significant progress has been made in strengthening the Consolidated Appeal Process, particularly by enhancing the capacity of country teams to manage and implement the process, through training and workshops. For 2000, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has launched CAPs for nine African countries, proposing programmes for a total of $873,521,728. By mid June 2000, $280,880,505 had been raised, approximately one third of the requested amount. The lack of adequate funding, particularly for countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo, continues to hamper the effectiveness of response. The Integrated Regional Information Network for Africa, with offices in Abidjan, Nairobi and Johannesburg, supports coordination efforts by disseminating humanitarian information widely and promoting exchanges among United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, peace institutions, donor countries, Governments, academia and the media.

62. WFP has also endeavoured to contribute to the harmonization of resources and capacities in policy formulation, programming and implementation of operations. Its offer of common logistical services for the humanitarian community is an example of such inter-agency coordination.

4. Assisting and protecting children

63. UNICEF has been particularly active in its efforts on behalf of child soldiers. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its action has focused on advocating changes in government policy and technical support in developing a national plan for demobilization and reintegration, culminating in the Kinshasa Forum, involving nine countries and numerous partners. The clear commitments by senior governmental representatives, non-governmental organizations and civil society on child soldier demobilization at a time of increasing military tension was a demonstration of the impact of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Sierra Leone, some 1,700 children have been through the disarmament process, out of an estimated 5,000 child combatants. About 800 of these have been reunited with their families, while others are in interim care centres supported by UNICEF, where they receive food and accommodation as well as health care, counselling, and recreational and educational activities while attempts are made to reunite them with their families. Under 20 per cent of the children in these centres have left to rejoin armed groups or have been dispersed. This is a vast improvement over previous events when all children returned to armed factions.

64. The interests of children affected by war have also figured prominently in activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, notably at the West African Conference on War-affected Children (Accra, April 2000). In a Declaration adopted by consensus, participating States called on ECOWAS member States to provide, with the support of United

Nations agencies and donors, full protection, access and relief to refugees and internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are women and children, in accordance with international refugee law and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[1] and also to commit themselves to promoting subregional, cross-border initiatives to reduce the displacement of populations and the separation of families. The Plan of Action adopted by the Conference reiterates these points and contains a commitment to provide the resources required to maintain educational services for children, including refugee and internally displaced children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

5. Post-conflict reconstruction

65. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is currently engaged in developing a subregional programme for post-conflict reconstruction, focusing initially on the Mano River Basin countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Known as the Mano River Initiative, its aim is to assist the process of peace-building within and among the three countries by focusing on joint economic, humanitarian and development activities to help consolidate peace and prevent a recurrence of armed conflict. A key objective of the Initiative is to facilitate the resettlement and reintegration of refugees and other displaced persons by focusing on job-creating and income-generating activities in the three countries.

66. ECA will be involved in resource mobilization to support the activities of humanitarian aid agencies, providing significant institutional and technical support to UNHCR and other relief agencies in formulating and implementing community-based quick impact projects to facilitate and consolidate the reintegration of returnees in countries emerging from conflict. Support for reintegration will also take the form of promoting good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights and of providing an effective mechanism for conflict resolution to address the root causes of population displacement.

6. Internally Displaced Persons in Africa

67. Violence remains a major cause of population displacement in Africa. While many civilians continue to flee across international borders, many others remain trapped inside their country and do not always benefit from the attention of the international community. Renewed concerns for the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were expressed by the Security Council in January 2000.

68. Following internal consultations and discussions with member States, UNHCR issued a position paper in March 2000 restating its views on its role vis-à-vis IDPs and emphasizing that, while it was prepared to take a more proactive role, it would prefer to do so within a collaborative framework of the United Nations system.

69. UNHCR's involvement in the Angolan internally displaced persons programme may be considered the first test case of this position. Following the findings of an inter-agency mission in March 2000, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, and UNHCR's own rapid assessment mission in April of this year, the High Commissioner proposed that her Office should intervene in Angola in three provinces (Uige, Zaire and Luanda Bengo) where the situation of internally displaced persons was considered to be alarming. The intervention is essentially limited to areas of return and will focus on the most critical sectors of shelter, health, sanitation and community services. Protection measures will also figure prominently, including advocacy, standard-setting, monitoring, advisory services, interventions with the Government, and reporting.

70. A similar approach is being applied by UNHCR in addressing the needs of internally displaced persons in Eritrea. As stated earlier, the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia has displaced some 750,000 people, representing almost a third of Eritrea's 3.5 million population, according to government figures. UNHCR estimates that some 550,000 displaced Eritreans require assistance and protection. UNHCR considers that measures to address their needs would serve both to prevent further population outflows and to help ensure the effective reintegration of persons returning to their homes and those who face massive destruction of the infrastructure caused by the conflict. UNHCR's activities, which are designed to benefit not only the internally displaced persons but also refugees returning from the Sudan, will be undertaken in close collaboration with other partners, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations agencies.

71. The human rights situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa is also addressed through a variety of activities undertaken by OHCHR.

They include field activities in a number of African countries, monitoring and reporting by special mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights, in particular the country-specific special rapporteurs for Africa. The Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, according to whom Africa is the continent most affected by the global crisis of internal displacement, has focused attention on the problem of internal displacement there.

72. As a follow-up to the OAU Ministerial Meeting on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa (Khartoum, December 1998), in which OHCHR participated, the OAU Commission on Refugees and Displaced Persons invited the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons to present the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to the Commission at its thirtieth session, held in June 1999. The Guiding Principles, which were developed by the Representative, restate the relevant norms for the protection of the internally displaced in all phases of displacement, providing protection from displacement, and protection and assistance during displacement and during return or resettlement and reintegration. The report of the OAU Secretary-General made reference to the Workshop on Internal Displacement held in Addis Ababa in October 1998 and co-sponsored by the OAU, UNHCR and the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, and in particular to its recommendation to explore the role of Africa's regional and subregional organizations in addressing the problem of internal displacement.

D. Regional and subregional initiatives

1. Organization of African Unity

73. In commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, the OAU and UNHCR decided to organize a special meeting of technical experts and policy advisers on international refugee protection. At the invitation of the Government of Guinea, the meeting took place in Conakry from 27 to 29 March 2000. It was attended by some 120 experts from OAU member States, the OAU Commission on Refugees, regional and subregional organizations, UNHCR, other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and individual experts. It served to formulate concrete proposals as a basis for a comprehensive implementation plan to help strengthen and enhance the implementation of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the regime of international protection for asylum-seekers, refugees and returnees and to facilitate the search for effective durable solutions to refugee problems in the years to come. The plan will provide a framework for UNHCR's protection strategy in Africa, giving fresh impetus to efforts for the benefit of refugees in Africa, following the dramatic crises of the past decade.

74. Other examples of cooperation with OAU include measures to strengthen links with its Committee on Human and People's Rights, in order to intensify collaboration, addressing issues such as the root causes of refugee movements, the promotion of refugee protection, and assistance to areas affected by the presence of refugees. Discussions have also been initiated by UNHCR to expand the mandate and membership of OAU's Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection of Refugees so as to improve refugee-related policies throughout the continent. The consultations resulted in the adoption of new rules and procedures in support of efforts to harmonize refugee and humanitarian programmes in Africa, especially at the emergency phase.

2. Intergovernmental Authority on Development

75. UNHCR participated actively in the activities of the United Nations country teams in the region, particularly with regard to the advancement of policies and programmes in the humanitarian sector. In Ethiopia, UNHCR, in collaboration with UNDP, agreed to promote and to support the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) initiative on conflict prevention, management, and resolution and the alleviation of humanitarian crises through the development of area-based plans of action. The plans were aimed at phasing out humanitarian assistance and bringing in longer-term development programmes. In this context, a multisectoral mission was undertaken to north-west Somalia and the Somali national regional state. Its findings led directly to the development of a cross-border programme for reintegration and the rehabilitation of refugee-affected areas.

76. UNHCR worked closely with IGAD to ensure that humanitarian issues — including refugees and their voluntary repatriation — remained on the agenda of peace initiatives for Somalia and Sudan. A discussion on how to ensure that refugees have a voice in peace initiatives and are kept properly informed is being carried forward in the year 2000.

77. The five countries most directly threatened by drought are situated in this region. In Ethiopia an estimated 8 million people, of whom 1.4 million are under the age of five, are at immediate risk. In Somalia, up to 1 million people in the central and southern parts of the country are at risk, including 300,000 children under five. In Eritrea more than 500,000 people are at risk, and in Kenya some 700,000 people are at immediate risk, including 100,000 under the age of five. In addition to $3 million borrowed from its own emergency reserve, UNICEF offices in the main drought-affected countries have submitted their urgent requirements, totalling $8 million, to be covered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Complex Emergencies Revolving Fund.

3. West Africa "stability pact"

78. Another important area of mutual partnership and collaborative efforts between UNHCR and international development agencies, including regional bodies, is the "stability pact" being proposed for West Africa. The idea, being discussed and refined among policy makers, involves three key concepts: social change, including a more significant role for civil society; trust in the leadership as guarantor of security and peace; and economic opportunities for all. In the months to come, UNHCR will continue to play a catalytic role in developing the pact and will ensure that all interested parties are involved.

79. In this context, UNHCR has strengthened its collaboration with regional financial institutions such as the African Development Bank. In June of this year, a meeting of technical experts of the two institutions took place in Abidjan, to review areas of mutual cooperation.

III. Conclusion

80. UNHCR rightly remarked in her traditional Africa Refugee Day message that if peace was to replace war and suffering throughout this continent, it was going to require the shared responsibility of all Africans. Conflicts would not be resolved unless all countries — and their citizens — took collective responsibility for achieving peace.

81. Despite its limited resources, UNHCR in collaboration with the United Nations system and other partners, will continue to protect and provide assistance to refugees and displaced persons in Africa. The rebuilding of a peaceful society cannot be achieved without the successful return and reintegration of displaced persons and refugees. It is therefore crucial to find durable solutions to their plight, wherever possible. However, durable solutions can be found only if the alarming pattern of violence in the continent is resolutely reversed.

82. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the High Commissioner, Ms. Sadako Ogata, who will complete her term at the end of December 2000 after 10 years of heroic service to refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. She has always been a strong advocate for the plight of millions of vulnerable people in Africa, whom she and her dedicated colleagues have been and are continuing to assist, often in difficult and dangerous situations.

Notes

[1] E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2.